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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

Among those which have been newly added are *The Faun Captive*, with its especially beautiful opening lines, *Fantasy*, *R. V. and Another, Captive*, and this *Inarticulate Grief*, which is as fine as anything in the volume:

Let the sea beat its thin torn hands
In anguish against the shore;
Let it moan
Between headland and cliff;
Let the sea shriek out its agony
Across waste sands and marshes,
And clutch great ships,
Tearing them plate from steel plate
In reckless anger;
Let it break the white bulwarks
Of harbor and city;
Let it sob and scream and laugh
In a sharp fury,
With white salt tears
Wet on its writhen face;
Ah! let the sea still be mad
And crash in madness among the shaking rocks—
For the sea is the cry of our sorrow.

Mark Turbyfill

ON THEIR WAY

Gargoyles, by Howard Mumford Jones. Cornhill Co.
Banners, by Babette Deutch. George H. Doran Co.
The New Day, by Scudder Middleton. Macmillan Co.
Blue Smoke, by Karle Wilson Baker. Yale Univ. Press.

Some are born poets—may others achieve poetry? Books like those listed above tempt one to ask this question. Or perhaps the question is slightly different: may one who has a certain aptitude and love of the art win out finally, through

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hard work and the sloughing off of faults, to a poetic expression of his vision which, though not magical, not a flame of divine fire, may yet glow with a certain authentic, if more earthly, beauty?

Mr. Jones, for example, comes slowly to artistic maturity; his book is almost entirely practice work, the literary exercises of a man overburdened with impedimenta, and slow and stubborn in getting rid of them. But it contains a few poems, notably *A Song of Butte*, which begin to win free.

Most of the book baffles one—so much knowledge, feeling, intuitive psychology unfused into forms of power or beauty. The author loves the Lake Michigan dunes, no doubt, but he must desecrate them with the rusty machinery of pettier spaces, unloading a whole pack of “fairy shallops,” mermaids, pixies, elves and dryads; or, when he gets nearer to his subject, as in *November* or *Night*, he is still impeded by an inherited stanza-form too trivial to relate itself to the wild spaciousness of the dunes.

In *His Mother* one grants the poet's intuition of the vampire-parent's psychology while regretting the prosiness of the sonnets which unfold it. The *University Sketches* also are true expositions of human character; *The Professor Muses*, especially, presents effectively, in blank-verse monologue, the teacher's shy sympathy with the young things who stream through his classroom. But mostly one feels the philosopher rather than the poet; one finds statement rather than song. Even a dreaming professor cannot evoke Venus herself by crying:

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Ah Aphrodite!
Thou dead, thou deathless goddess,
Sprung of the wind and the wave and the clean sweet foam!

And the three or four *Sketches* in poetic prose carry for me an imitative Nietzschean pose.

A Song of Butte seems the best thing in the book because, though still somewhat rhetorical, it conquers and carries its medium, makes a living, unified, vital portrait of a somewhat sinister modern town:

I am the city demoniac! Desolate, mournful, infernal
Dweller apart among and upon the amazing hills.

It is a portrait with passion and beauty in it, worthy to stand beside Mary MacLane's revelation of the beauty and terror of Butte. Unfortunately it is too long to quote.

Miss Deutsch's book is of a more modern expertness; but perhaps her struggle is less severe, her vision of life less clouded with metaphysical veils. Too many of her poems are an assertion of emotion rather than the emotion itself. It is not enough, for example, to call a poem *Bacchanal* and cry:

Oh, we are mad—
We are drunk with wine of the god,
Our feet are athrill with the juice of the vine we have trod.

Nor does *Trails* quite persuade us, even granting its keen touch at the end.

But a few of the poems are vividly descriptive, like a good landscape of fresh color: *Ephemeris*, *Smoke*, *Genre*. In two or three—*Song*, *Walls*, *Solitude*—a real emotion is expressed with lyric brevity and directness. And once or twice deeper

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feeling molds the poems into a finer beauty. In this *Death of a Child* sharp pain uses effectively the practiced hand:

Are you at ease now,
Do you suck content
From death's dark nipple between your wan lips—
Now that the fever of the day is spent
And anguish slips
From the small limbs,
And they lie lapped in rest,
The young head pillowed soft upon that indurate breast?
No, you are quiet,
And forever;
Though for us the silence is so loud with tears—
Wherein we hear the dreadful-footed years
Echoing, but your quick laughter never;
Never your stumbling run, your sudden face
Thrust in bright scorn upon our solemn fears.
Now the dark mother holds you close . . . Oh, you
We loved so,
How you lie
So strangely still, unmoved so utterly,
Dear yet, but oh, a little alien too!

Mr. Middleton's book is mostly rhymed eloquence; such poems as *1919* and *The Poets* are moralistic and rhetorical, and *Children* is labored and over-expansive. It is rather the briefer poems in *The New Day* which give one a breath of hope, because of a delicate touch in them, a flavor, a perfume. One may mention especially *Interlude*, *Dream Rover*, *Burial*, and this *Carnival*:

Why do you go before the maple leaves
Open, like little hands, to welcome spring?
O lovely woman, is your heart afraid
Of all the truths the trees of April bring?

Just when the carnival begins, you go.
Alone I watch the dancing of the earth.

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Though you may raise the cloak before your face,
You cannot hide the meaning of this mirth.

In Mrs. Baker's book one finds a slight but delicate lyric strain, impeded by difficulties and sentimentalities, but gradually gaining clarity and precision. Some of the poems date back more than a decade to the days when "Charlotte Wilson" was a familiar name in the magazines. The sonnet written in 1910 at the too-early death of William Vaughn Moody moves one, in spite of its stumbling gait, by its quiet simplicity and sincerity.

A few of the later poems show the same qualities, with a more expert handling—*Apple and Rose*, for example, or *Graves in France*, or this *Eagle Youth*:

They have taken his horse and plume,
They have left him to plod, and fume
For a hero's scope and room!
They have curbed his fighting pride,
They have bade him burrow and hide
With a million, side by side:
Look—into the air he springs,
Fighting with wings!

He had found a way to be free
Of that dun immensity
That would swallow up such as he:
Who would burrow when he could fly?
He will climb up into the sky
And the world shall watch him die!
Only his peers may dare
Follow him there!

H. M.